



The Resolved Church

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The Christian and Counseling

By Pastor Duane Smets

The word "counsel" comes from the Latin *consilium* and was used throughout history primarily in the context of those seeking advice from a lawyer until 1940 when the term was first used in reference to one giving professional advice on social or psychological problems.

The picture of a Christian in the Bible is one who is constantly seeking counsel in the wisdom of God (Jn 1:5) revealed by his Word (2 Pet 1:3) and confirmed by God's Spirit (Jn 16:3), God's people (Col 3:16), and God's pastors (Heb 13:17). The essence of being a disciple or a follower of Christ in many ways is that you are constantly getting counsel and advice for your life.

In our day and age here at the turn of the century there is a lot of confusion among "Christians" concerning counseling. There are four main views:

Professionalism - Counseling is something only some people need and is to be done by "professionals" which are those who have an MFT, MFCC- MA, MS, MD, and/or PhD degree and license in Psychology or Psychiatry. In this view, counseling is part of the "sciences" in which faith and spirituality are largely unrelated.

Integrationalism - Counseling is something some people may need and should be done by a Christian "professional." In this view, the Christian worldview is seen as something which can at times be helpful to the counselor or counselee and be integrated into the professionally trained processes of psychology and psychiatry.

Nouthetic Counseling - Counseling is something all people need since all Christians are to *noutheteo*, which means to admonish, correct and counsel one another (Rom 15:14). In this view, only the Christian with only the Bible are truly able to counsel, because in God's Word are "all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3)."

Biblical Counseling - Counseling is something all people need and some people may need the help of a person with formal training and experience in applying the truths of the Bible to life. In this view, Jesus Christ is emphasized as the chief counselor (Is 9:6) and answer to all issues of life who especially equips his pastors in caring for people's souls (Heb 13:17).

These are very brief definitions which try to emphasize or highlight the distinctives of these views. The first two views are alike in that they have secular psychology principles at the base as their foundational framework of understanding. The second two views are alike in that they are both have the Bible at their base as their foundation framework of understanding. Here are some important questions to ask regarding counseling:

What is a human?

Is the human being only a physical being (skin, flesh, bones etc.) or is there a non-physical part to a human being (a soul, spirit, personality etc.)? Are the issues, concerns, causes or needs for counseling primarily physical or non-physical?

What is the moral condition of the human?

Is the human a moral being and if so is the human naturally or basically good/righteous or evil/sinful? Are there any issues, concerns, causes or needs for counseling that do not pertain to morality?

What do you believe about the Bible?

Is the Bible simply a helpful tool to be added to our knowledge of many other things or is Scripture God's special revelation given to mankind (2 Tim 3:16) because of the futility of the knowledge we may gain from his world (Rom 1:19-22)?

What do you believe about Jesus?

Does Jesus and the message of the gospel have anything to do with our lives here and now or is Jesus only security for the afterlife? Does the good news of Jesus effect the moral quality and character of the Christian person?

Are you teachable?

Is counseling something sought in order to be instructed, corrected, and helped because you are in need or is counseling something sought in order to have a place to vent, complain, or find "secret" reasons to why your life is the way it is?

What is a pastor?

Why has Jesus instructed that pastors preach (1 Tim 5:17), teach (Eph 4:11), correct wrong thinking (Acts 20:28-30), and care for people's souls (Heb 13:17)? Is a pastor only someone who gives a sermon you listen to for inspiration or does a pastor have a place to speak into the specifics of your life?

It is my conviction that human beings have soul and that all the issues, concerns, causes or needs for counseling whether they be physical or non-physical stem from the effects of our own personal sin and responses to the sins against us. I believe the Bible is specifically given for us to help us see our sin, turn to trust in Jesus and experience ongoing transformation by Jesus. This happens first through humble confession of our sinfulness, then putting faith in the person and work of Jesus on the cross, then continuing in that faith through the ongoing counsel of the Bible, Christian discipleship, and Christian pastors.

It is for the reasons stated above that I only recommend Nouthetic or Biblical Counselors to Christians. Professional and integrative approaches are fundamentally flawed and inept at their base because they do not have God and his Word as their chief concern. It is not that we cannot learn, use or apply things from the professional or integrative approaches or even potentially turn to things like medication in extreme and biblically warranted cases...it is that the person and other worldviews and methodologies must first be sifted through the sieve of Scripture and not the other way around.

May we as Christians ever strive and aspire to bring great glory to our God by seizing every means God has said will accomplish what human heart and life needs...to be conformed into the wonderful image of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29).

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Counselor/Counseling Resource Centers

National Association of Nouthetic Counselors

<http://www.nanc.org>

Institute for Nouthetic Studies

<http://www.nouthetic.org/>

Christian Counseling Educational Foundation

<http://www.ccef.org/>

Books

"Competent to Counsel" by Jay E. Adams

"Competent to Counsel? A History of a Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement" by David Powlison

"How People Change" by Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp

"Introduction to Biblical Counseling" ed. John MacArthur

"Psychology & Christianity, Four Views" by David Myers, Gary Collins, Robert Roberts and David Powlison.

Online Articles

(CCEF) Christian Counseling Educational Foundation "Frequently Asked Questions"

<http://www.ccef.org/counseling-services-frequently-asked-questions>

"Rediscovering Biblical Counseling" by John MacArthur

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/rediscoveringbc1.htm>

"The Sufficiency of Scripture in Counseling" by Wayne Mack

www.tms.edu/tmsj/tmsj9d.pdf

"The Bible, Psychology and You" by Wendell E. Miller

<http://www.biblical-counsel.org/bcs-02.htm>

"What Distinguishes Biblical Counseling from other Methods?" by David Powlison

<http://www.9marks.org/CC/article/0,,PTID314526%7CCHID598014%7CCIID2008804,00.html>

"What is Nouthetic Counseling" by Jay Adams

<http://www.nouthetic.org/nouthetic-counseling/what-is-nouthetic-counseling.html>